

BACILLUS AND

A Tragedy To Be Played by Three Rabbits and a Pair of Hands; Written by Heywood Brown, With Pictures by L. M. Glackens

CIRCUMSTANCE

Introduction by Susan K. Snivelie, Secretary-Treasurer of the Dumb Friend Animal Protective and Anti-Vivisection League

INTRODUCTION

When anybody asks me what "Bacillus and Circumstance" is all about, I am somewhat at a loss how to answer because it is about so many things. First of all, it points out the injustice of burdening dumb animals by inoculation with ills which they have by no means merited in the course of hygienic and carefully considered lives. This time it is gout, and the author has pointed out that the tragedy lies not so much in the pain as in the humiliation suffered by the sterling hero, Peter J. Cottontail, when he falls under the suspicion of suffering from the effects of alcoholic excess, although as a matter of fact he is a strict teetotal rabbit. As Mr. Shakespeare has so succinctly said "Oh, the pity of it."

Although the people in the play are rabbits, the scope of the drama is much broader. They might be white mice or guinea pigs or any of our dumb friends. In addition to animal experimentation the author indirectly treats alcohol without mercy. After the play had been completed some petty critic pointed out to the author that the gout germ has never been discovered, but the author says that in producing the play almost any sort of microbes can be used, as all germs look alike to those in the gallery and the last ten rows of the orchestra.

We had hoped to have notes for some of the difficult passages and an article by the author on "What I Owe to Ibsen and More Pressing Liabilities," but as Mr. Shakespeare has so felicitously expressed it, "The play's the thing."

IT IS evening in the home of Peter J. Cottontail. The scene is a conventional parlor of a rabbit family of the upper middle class. About the room there is the sort of furniture a well-to-do rabbit would have, and on the shelves the books you would naturally expect. "Leaves of Grass" is there, of course; possibly "Cabbages and Kings," and perhaps a volume or two of "The Winning of the West," with a congratulatory inscription from the author. The walls have one or two good prints of famous scenes and an excellent lithographic likeness of Thomas Malthus, but most of the space is given over to photographs of the family.

In the centre of the room is a small square table, the surface of which is covered with figures ranged in curious patterns such as 2x5=10, and even so radical an arrangement as 7x8=56. At the rise of the curtain Jeremiah T. Cottontail is discovered seated in an easy chair reading the current edition of The New York Evening Post. He is middle-aged and wears somewhat ill fitting brown fur, tinged with gray, and horn rimmed spectacles. He looks a little like Lloyd George. As a matter of fact, his grandfather was Welsh. The actor should convey to the audience by means of pantomime that he has made more than a thousand dollars that afternoon by selling Amalgamated Cabbage short, and that there will be a tidy surplus for himself even after he has fulfilled his promise to make up the deficit incurred by the charity hop of the Bone Dry Prohibition Union. Now and again he smiles and pats his stomach complacently. It is essential that the actor should indicate beyond the peradventure of a doubt that Peter J. Cottontail has never touched spirit-

uous or malt liquors or anything containing more than 2 per cent of alcohol per fluid ounce.

As P. J. Cottontail peruses his paper the ceiling of the room is suddenly plucked aside and two hands are thrust into the parlor. One of the hands seizes Mr. Cottontail, and the other hand, which holds a hypodermic needle, stabs the helpless householder and injects into his veins the contents of the needle. It is a fluid gray and forbidding. There is no sound unless the actor who plays Cottontail chooses to squeak just once.

Here the curtain descends. It rises again almost immediately, but five days are supposed to have elapsed. Mr. Cottontail is again seated in the centre of the room, and he is again reading The Evening Post. The property man should take pains to see that the paper shall be dated five days later than the one used in the prologue. It might also be well to change the headline from "Submarine Crisis Acute" to "Submarine Crisis Still Acute." It is also to be noted that on this occasion Mr. Cottontail has removed his right shoe in favor of a large, roomy slipper. On the opposite side of the table sits Mrs. Cottontail. She is middle-aged but comely. A strong minded female, one would say, with a will of her own, but rather in awe of the ability and more particularly the virtue of Mr. Cottontail. Yet Mr. Cottontail is evidently in ill humor this evening. He takes no pleasure in his paper, but fidgets uneasily. At last he speaks with great irritation.

MR. COTTONTAIL—Is that doctor ever coming?

MRS. COTTONTAIL—I left word at Doctor Cony's house that you were in a good deal of pain, and that he should come around the minute he got home. (The door bell rings.) Here he is now. I'll send him up. (She goes out the door, and a few moments later there enters Dr. Charles Cony. He is a distinguished and forceful physician, but a meagre little body for all that. He carries a black bag.)

DR. CONY (Removing his gloves and opening the bag)—Sorry I couldn't get here any sooner, but I've been on the go all day. An obstetrician gets mighty little rest hereabouts, I can tell you. Well, now, Mr. Cottontail, what can I do for you? What seems to be the trouble?

COTTONTAIL (Pointing to the open door, and lifting one finger to his mouth)—Shush!

DR. CONY—Really! (The physician crosses the room in one hop and closes the door.)

COTTONTAIL—The pain's in my foot. My big toe, I think, but that's not what worries me—

DR. CONY (Breaking in)—Pains worse at night than it does during the daytime, doesn't it? Throbs a bit right now, hey?

COTTONTAIL—Yes, it does, but that isn't the trouble.

DR. CONY—That's trouble enough. I'll try to have you loping around again in a month or so.

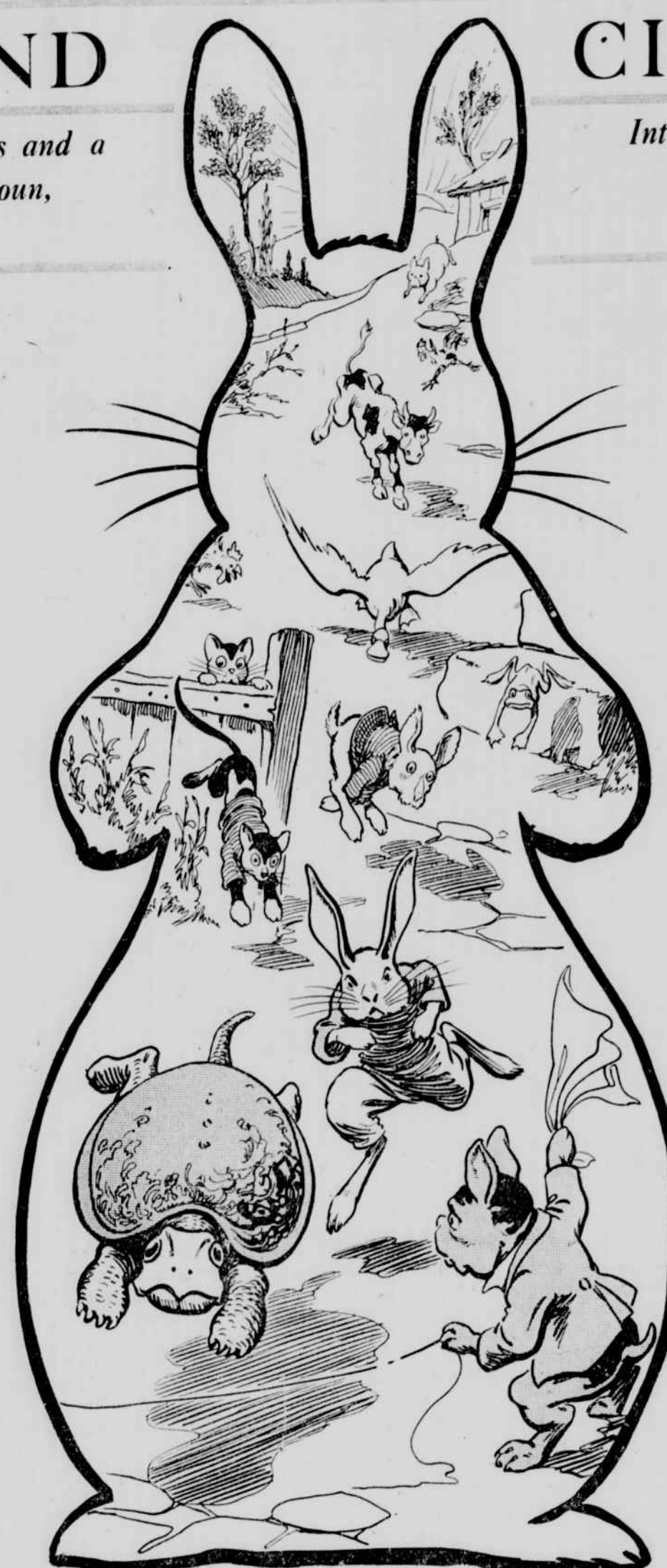
COTTONTAIL—But there's more than the pain. It's the worry. I haven't told a soul. I thought at first it might be a nightmare.

DR. CONY—Dreams, eh? Very significant, sometimes, but we'll get to them later.

COTTONTAIL—But I'm afraid it wasn't a dream.

DOCTOR—What wasn't a dream?

COTTONTAIL—Last Tuesday evening I



"I Can Still Remember the Day I Won My 'H' at Dear Old Hassenpfeffer"

was sitting in this room, quietly reading The Evening Post, when suddenly something tore the ceiling away, and down from above there came ten horrible pink tentacles and seized me in an iron grasp. Then something stabbed me with some sharp instrument. I was too frightened to move for several minutes, but when I looked up the ceiling was back in place as if nothing had touched it. I felt around for the wound, but the only thing I could find was a tiny scratch that seemed so small I might have had it some time without noticing it. I couldn't be sure it was a wound. In fact, I tried to make myself believe that the whole thing was all a dream, until I was taken sick to-night. Now I'm afraid that the sword, or whatever it was that stabbed me, must have been poisoned.

DR. CONY (Sharply)—Let me look at your tongue. (Cottontail complies.) Seems all right. Hold out your hands. Spread your fingers. (He studies the patient for a moment.) Nothing much the matter there. (Producing pen and paper.) If it was only March now I'd know what to say. Let's see what we can find out about hereditary influence. Father and mother living?

COTTONTAIL—I had no father or mother. I came out of a trick hat in a vaudeville act.

DR. CONY—That makes it a little more difficult, doesn't it? Do you happen to remember what sort of a hat?

COTTONTAIL (A little proudly)—It was quite a high hat.

DR. CONY—Yes, it would be. What color?

COTTONTAIL—Black and shiny.

DR. CONY—That seems normal enough. I'm afraid there's nothing significant there. (Anxiously.) No fixed delusions? You don't think you're Na-

oleon or the White Rabbit or anything like that, do you? Do you feel like growling or biting anybody?

COTTONTAIL—Of course not. There's nothing the matter with my brain.

DR. CONY—Perhaps you went to sleep and dreamed it all.

COTTONTAIL—No, I distinctly saw the ceiling open and I felt the stab very sharply. I couldn't possibly have been asleep. I was reading a most interesting dramatic review in The Evening Post.

DR. CONY—But you weren't stabbed in the big toe, now, were you?

COTTONTAIL—Well, no.

DR. CONY—And you will admit that the ceiling's just the same as it ever was?

COTTONTAIL—It looks the same from here. I haven't called any workmen in yet to examine it.

DR. CONY—Take my advice and don't. Just let's keep the matter between ourselves and forget it. I'm afraid you've been working too hard. Drop your business. Do a little light reading, and after a bit may be I'd like to have you go to a show. Something with songs and bunny-hugging and jokes and chorus girls. None of this birth control stuff. I don't see how any self-respecting rabbit could go to a play like the one I saw last night. (He goes to his instrument case and produces a stethoscope.)

DR. CONY—Have you had your heart examined lately?

COTTONTAIL (Visibly nervous)—No.

DR. CONY—Any shortness of breath or palpitation?

COTTONTAIL—I don't think so.

DR. CONY—If that's a vest you have on, take it off. There, now (He stands in front of Cottontail with his stethoscope poised in the air. Cottontail is

trembling. Dr. Cony allows the hand holding the stethoscope to drop to his side and remarks provocatively), I'll bet you Maranville doesn't hit .250 this season.

COTTONTAIL (Amazed)—Really, sir, I never bet. No, never. I don't know what you are talking about, anyway.

DR. CONY—That's all right, that's all right. Don't agitate yourself. Just a little professional trick. I wanted to calm you down. Now (he makes a hurried examination), Mr. Cottontail, I don't want you to run. I don't want you to climb stairs. Avoid excitement and don't butter your parsnips. Fine words are just as good, no matter what anybody may tell you, and they don't create fatty tissue. Of course, you've got to have some exercise. You might play a little golf. Say, about three holes a day.

COTTONTAIL (Sadly)—Three holes?

DR. CONY—Yes, that will be enough.

COTTONTAIL (Musing)—It's a little tough, doctor. I can still remember the day I won my "H" at dear old Hassenpfeffer in the cross-country run. I had the lungs and the legs then. Even now I can feel the wind on my face as I came across the meadow and up that last, long hill. They were cheering for me to come on. I can tell you I just leaped along. It was nothing at all for me. If I'd sprinted just a bit sooner I could have been first in a hop. Anyhow, I was second. There was nobody ahead of me but the Tortoise. (Cheerlessly.) Three holes of golf a day!

DR. CONY—Come, come, sir, be a rabbit. There's no cheating nature, you know. You had your fun, and now you must pay.

COTTONTAIL—What's the matter with me?

DR. CONY—Plain, old-fashioned gout.

COTTONTAIL—What does that come from?

DR. CONY (With evident relish)—From too much ale or porter or claret or burgundy or champagne or sherry or Rhine Wine or Clover Clubs or Piper Heidsieck or brandy or Bronxes or absinthe or stingers, but the worst of all and the best of all is port wine.

COTTONTAIL (Horried)—You mean it comes from drinking?

DR. CONY—In all my twenty-five years of professional practice I have never known a case of gout without antecedent alcoholism.

COTTONTAIL (Much relieved)—Well, then, it can't be gout. I've never taken a drink in my life.

DR. CONY—In all my twenty-five years of professional experience I've never made an incorrect diagnosis. It is gout.

COTTONTAIL—But I'm president of the Bone Dry Prohibition Union.

DR. CONY—The more shame to you, sir.

COTTONTAIL—What shall I do?

DR. CONY—Obey my instructions implicitly. A good many doctors will tell you that they can't cure gout. Undoubtedly they are right. They can't. But I can. Only you simply must stop drinking. Cutting down and tapering off to ten or twelve drinks a day won't do. You must stop absolutely. No liquor at all. Do you understand? Not a drop, sir.

COTTONTAIL (His nose violently palpitating with emotion)—I never took a drink in my life. I'm president of the Bone Dry Prohibition Union. I was just sitting quietly reading The Evening Post—

DR. CONY—Save that story for your

bone-dry friends. I have nothing to do with your past life. I'm not judging you. It's nature that says the alcoholic must pay and pay and pay. I'm only concerned now with the present and the future, and the present is that you're suffering from alcoholism manifested in gout, and the future is that you'll die if you don't stop drinking.

COTTONTAIL—I tell you I promised my Sunday school teacher when I was a boy that I would always be a Little Light Bearer, and that I would never take a drink if I lived to be a hundred.

DR. CONY—Don't worry, you won't live that long, and don't take on so. You're not the first one that's had his fun and then been dragged up by the heels for it. Cheer up. Remember the good times that are gone. Life can't be all carrots, you know.

COTTONTAIL—But I never had any good times.

DR. CONY—Oh, yes, you did, I'll warrant you. There must have been many merry nights, as the bottle passed around the table. (With evident gusto.) Maybe there was a rousing song—"When Leeks Are Young in Spring-time"—or something like that, and I wouldn't be surprised if now and again there was some fluff little miss to sing soprano to your bass. Youth! Youth! To be young, a rabbit and stewed. (Quoting reminiscently.) "A leaf of lettuce underneath the bough." After all, salad days are the best days. I never meet an old rabbit with gout but I take off my hat and say, "Sir, you have lived."

COTTONTAIL (Wildly)—It's not true. I never lived like that. I never took a drink in my life. You can ask anybody. Nobody ever saw me take a drink.

DR. CONY—That's bad. You solitary drunkards are always the hardest to handle. But you've simply got to stop. You must quit drinking or die, that's all there is to it.

COTTONTAIL—This is terrible. It must have been that poisoned sword. I tell you, I was just sitting here quietly, reading The Evening Post—

DR. CONY—My dear sir, please rid yourself right away of the alcoholic's habit of confusing cause and effect. He thinks he's sick because green elephants are walking on him, while, as a matter of fact, green elephants are walking on him because he's sick. It's terribly simple, when you stop to figure it out.

COTTONTAIL—You don't think I saw any pink monster come through the ceiling?

DR. CONY—On the contrary, I'm sure you did. But the point is, you mustn't see him again, and the only way to avoid seeing him is to quit drinking. Your fun's done. Now, be a good patient and tell me you'll stop drinking—

COTTONTAIL—I tell you I never had any fun. I never had any fun—

DR. CONY—Well, strictly speaking, it isn't the fun that hurts you, it's the rum.

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"Down from Above There Came Ten Horrible Pink Tentacles"



"Let Me Look at Your Tongue"